

Cumston Hall  
East side of Main Street  
Monmouth  
Kennebec County  
Maine

HABS No. ME-161

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## CUMSTON HALL

Location: East side of Main Street, Monmouth, Kennebec County, Maine

Present Owner: Town of Monmouth

Present Occupants: The Monmouth Public Library, Monmouth Town Offices, and The Theater at Monmouth

Present Use: Library, town offices, meeting hall, theater offices, summer theater presentations

Statement of Significance: This large, elaborately Romanesque structure, built 1899-1900, is an unusual multi-purpose community building of the period.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Land originally given to the town in the eighteenth century, occupied by the Yellow Meeting House 1795 to 1844 and the Town House 1845 to 1899. Built 1899-1900, at a cost of about \$20,000. Dedicated June 28, 1900.
2. Architect: Harry Hayman Cochrane (1860-1946), of Monmouth, Maine. Mr. Cochrane, a photographer, portrait painter, composer, musician, and writer, was best known as a mural painter. His murals decorate churches and buildings throughout New England and in New York and Pennsylvania. Although he had no formal training as an architect, he did renovate many of the churches he decorated.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Town of Monmouth, only.
4. Construction: Dr. Charles M. Cumston gave Cumston Hall to the Town of Monmouth. Harry Hayman Cochrane supervised the building of the hall, and decorated the interior.
5. Alterations and additions: There have been recent, minor changes. Two small, freestanding box offices, in keeping with the original architecture, have been added in front of the main entrance. A one-and-a-half story addition has been made at the right (southern) end of the hall, behind the tower; this addition reused the original first-floor end windows. Another one-and-a-half story addition has

been made at the rear of the hexagonal structure at the northern end of Cumston Hall.

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B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Cumston Hall was the first building in Monmouth to have electric lights.

C. Supplemental Material: None

D. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Cumston Hall Souvenir, pamphlet, c. 1900.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources: None

b. Secondary and published sources:

Cumston Hall Souvenir, pamphlet, c. 1900.

Taylor, Eugene G. "Harry Cochrane of Monmouth was Man of Many Talents," Lewiston (Maine) Journal Magazine Section (April 15, 1967), p. 4-A.

The Theater at Monmouth, 1971 Festival Season (brochure) 1971.

Thornton, John R. "Cumston Hall Turns 70: Colorful Past, Future," Maine Sunday Telegram, (Portland) (August 9, 1970), p. 17C.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This two-and-a-half story wood and frame building has a five-bay facade with a wide projecting center bay. A one-and-a-half story hexagonal structure at the left is connected by a carriage shelter, and a square tower abuts at the right. The whole structure is flamboyantly detailed in a Romanesque manner.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main part of the building, approximately rectangular, is about 55 feet wide and 45 feet deep;

it is two-and-a-half stories tall. The tower is about 15 feet square and about 70 feet tall. The hexagonal structure is about 20 feet in diameter; it is one-and-a-half stories tall. The carriage shelter connecting it to the main part of the building is about 20 feet long.

2. Foundations: Granite. Poured concrete for the two recent additions.
3. Wall construction: Wood with wooden trim. The facade of the main building is mainly clapboarded with some sections finished with overlapping scallops and some with applied lattice work. The sides and rear are clapboarded. The tower is clapboarded except for a band of overlapping scallops. The hexagonal structure is clapboarded.
4. Exterior trim: The first floor is recessed across the entire width of the facade, creating a deep porch. Pairs of free-standing round columns on shingled pedestals separate the bays. The center projecting bay is framed by double pairs of columns supporting triangular pediments. These columns are all linked by applied wooden arches. Various string courses of carved wooden patterns decorate the tower and the facade of the main building. A carved fan decorates the gable of the projecting center bay; two similar fans are applied over windows on the tower. Small shingled turrets adorn the four corners of the tower and the left front corner of the main building. The carriage shelter roof is supported by a graceful wooden arch.
5. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys on the main building, one at the left rear and one at the middle of the right side. Both have recessed panels and projecting horizontal bands. One brick chimney at the rear of the hexagonal structure has projecting horizontal bands.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance door in the center bay is a double door with narrow vertical matched boarding. Other doors to additions and fire escapes are modern paneled doors.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Facade and rear wall center bay windows of main building are all arched stained and leaded glass windows of varying sizes. Middle story tower and right side main building windows are all square stained and leaded glass windows of similar size. There are groups of five narrow ten-light arched windows in each face of upper story of tower. Other windows are mainly double-hung two-light.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main part of the building has a hipped roof with a projecting gable roof in the front and rear centers over the projecting center bays; it is covered with asphalt shingles. The right addition has a shed and hip roof, and the addition behind the hexagonal structure has a hip roof; both are shingled in asphalt. The hexagonal structure has a pointed hexagonal roof; it is shingled in asphalt. The tower has a pyramidal roof; it is shingled in wood. All the roofs were originally shingled in wood.
- b. Cornice: The wooden cornice is wider across the facade of the main part of the building where it is raised and broken by the projecting center bay and has widely spaced brackets.
- c. Other trim: The ridge of the hipped roof and the ridge of the carriage shelter roof have applied ornamental wooden filigree. There is a weathervane on top of the tower.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: On the first floor of the main building are the public meeting hall to the left and the library to the right of the short center entrance hall. On the second floor a narrow lobby runs the length of the right side of the building, with a ticket window at the tower end. At the center of the lobby is the entrance to the theater, which occupies the entire remaining floor area. The hexagonal structure houses the town offices.
2. Stairways: The main stairway is housed in the tower; it is wide, enclosed with heavy molded panels, and has a paneled wainscot.
3. Flooring: Hardwood floors throughout.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: For the most part plaster, some of it frescoed. There is a wainscot of narrow vertical boards in the public meeting room and a paneled wainscot in the library and halls. The library ceiling has a simple ribboned fresco. There are exposed beams with dentil edging in public meeting room. The domed and vaulted theater deserves special emphasis. The ceiling is entirely frescoed and stuccoed. The scenes are of dancing classically garbed women and of cherubim. The stucco is of varying floral and formal motifs. The balcony rail, the proscenium arch, the oriel boxes flanking the stage, and the cornice are all stuccoed.

5. Doors: There are heavy paneled wooden doors, single and double. Leather double doors at the theater entrance have cast brass door plates in a French Rococo style.
6. Trim: There is heavy molded and carved wooden trim, stained dark in the public meeting room, painted in the library and halls; wide molded plaster and a carved and molded wooden cornice in the library; and elaborate plaster and stucco trim in the theater.
7. Lighting: Electric.

D. Site:

Cumston Hall faces directly west toward Main Street. It is set back from the street, approached by a circular drive. It is surrounded by a spacious lawn and ringed with mature, stately trees. The building is in the center of Monmouth.

Prepared by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.  
and  
Mary-Eliza Wengren  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during 1971 and 1972 in the course of a photo-data project in the cities of Bath, Hallowell, Monmouth, and Richmond in the State of Maine. The project was arranged in response to the initiative of Mrs. Linda B. Clark of Row House, Inc., in Hallowell, Dr. Charles E. Burden of the Bath Marine Museum, Mrs. Paul L. Roberts of the Richmond Historical and Cultural Society, and Mr. H. Earle Flanders of Monmouth. All of these preservationists actively solicited or contributed funds and effectively fostered increased interest in the architectural heritage of their respective communities. The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, at that time Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey; was supervised in the field by Denys Peter Myers, then Principal Architectural Historian of HABS; was carried on by Student Architectural Historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Boston University; and was continued by Alan Mast, Maine Arts and Humanities Commission, and Mary-Eliza Wengren (Mrs. Richard E., Jr.), Maine Historic Preservation Commission, under the field supervision of Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. Photographers were Mark C. Bisgrove, Sylvester Cobbs, Stanley Schwartz, Leon P. Shepard, and Richard Dwight Sturgis.